

AUDIO

GRIFFIN Evolve

★★★★★

£167 inc VAT

From www.morecomputers.co.uk


This set of wireless speakers from Griffin is one of the coolest audio products we've seen for some time. Each

140x140x140mm speaker has an internal battery that is charged when they are placed on the base unit. This means you can carry them around while they're playing and position each speaker anywhere you want, without being followed by a tangled trail of wires.

Like the XPhones set reviewed opposite, these speakers use radio frequency (RF) communication and their range is huge. We had to walk out of our 20m labs and up a flight of stairs before the sound even started to cut out. The batteries lasted for a full 12 hours before they had to be recharged.

The base unit houses the controls and a dock, which will take even the latest iPods. Evolve is sold primarily as an iPod accessory, but has very little in common with the mediocre design and poor sound quality typical of many iPod docks. A remote control allows you to control volume and track-skipping on your iPod.

You can also use Evolve to connect your iPod to a larger screen for video playback through either composite video or S-video. There are stereo RCA outputs so you can connect additional speakers to the system, and multiple Evolve wireless speaker units can be associated with the same base unit.

There's no risk of getting the speakers mixed up when you return



them to the base station, either, as they detect which side you've put them down on, and switch their output from left to right to match whichever side you last placed them on. In Mono mode, the speakers both play the left and right channels, so each can be used as a standalone unit.

The speakers are loud for their size and sound good, although their bass doesn't compare to sets with a separate subwoofer. The mid-range was a little fuzzy, making them better suited to dance, pop and rock music than delicate classical themes. Unrestricted by cables, they're easy to position for optimal sound quality anywhere in the room.

We've seen wireless speaker sets before, but none has impressed us as much as this one and none has been quite so much fun to use. It's expensive, but with its brilliant design, long battery life and good sound quality, Griffin's Evolve speaker system wins a Most Wanted award.

Kat Orphanides

SUMMARY

- ✓ Innovative design
- ✓ Excellent range
- ✗ Mediocre bass

WIRELESS IPOD DOCK SPEAKERS
2.0 configuration, 12W power, stereo RCA out, composite video out, S-video out (fifth generation iPods or later), stereo RCA inputs, iPod dock
PART CODE 6142-CUBES2
DETAILS www.evolveSpeakers.com

FAQ

Q Can I get wireless headphones that work with my iPod?

A Bluetooth is the most common wireless standard for speakers and headphones. Some MP3 players, such as recent Samsung models, have built-in Bluetooth, but Apple shows no signs of adopting the standard.

Fortunately, a lot of third-party accessories will plug into your iPod and send music to a pair of Bluetooth headphones. These include Gear4's BluStream TX and iSkin's Cerulean TX. Unfortunately, these Bluetooth adaptors are powered by your iPod, which means they'll reduce battery life, and Bluetooth headphones rarely sound as good as their wired counterparts.

Kat Orphanides

Printers and audio expert

kat@computershopper.co.uk


Also consider...

SANDISK Sansa e280

★★★★★

£68 inc VAT

From www.play.com


This 8GB MP3 player is great value. It has an impressive battery life of 18 hours and 17 minutes. Its control wheel and menu system are easy to use and the 1.8in colour screen is free from graininess. Audio quality was consistently good, and we were impressed by the speed and stability of its video-conversion software. It can be expanded via microSD cards.



MP3 PLAYER 8GB capacity, supports MP3, WMA, WMA-DRM, JPEG and BMP images, MOV video (with limitations), USB Hi-Speed interface
PART CODE SDMX4-8192-A70
DETAILS www.sandisk.com
FULL REVIEW Nov 2007

SHURE SE210

★★★★★

£69 inc VAT

From www.digitaldirect.co.uk


Shure's SE210 sound-isolating earphones block out almost all external noise, thanks to foam sleeves that expand to fill the ear canal. This makes music sound clear and powerful even at low volumes. They produce a rich, precise sound and an excellent listening experience. Wearing the foam sleeves feels strange at first, and the cables and connectors are heavier than those of most earphones, but you quickly become used to it.



EARPHONES 3.5mm stereo jack plug, 45cm cable, 10g, sensitivity 114dB, frequency response 22-19,000Hz, impedance 26 ohms
DETAILS www.shure.co.uk
FULL REVIEW Mar 2008

LOGITECH X-230

★★★★★

£27 inc VAT

From www.misco.co.uk


Logitech's X-230 speakers are among our all-time favourites, with a sound that's clearer, richer and more balanced than any other set under £50, and a few that cost more. The volume and bass controls are on the right satellite and subwoofer respectively, and all the cables except power protrude from the right satellite. If you want a set for music or games, there are no better speakers for this price.



STEREO SPEAKERS 2.1 configuration, 32W power, 3.5mm stereo cable inputs
PART CODE 970123-1120
DETAILS www.logitech.com
FULL REVIEW Jun 2007

TRITTON AX360

★★★★★

£90 inc VAT

From www.coolleststuff.co.uk

Tritton's AX360 headphones are a comfortable and solidly built set of cans that completely enclose your ears. They produce genuine directional sound using four separate speakers in each ear cup, including a subwoofer. An in-line volume control unit lets you adjust the volume of each of the four pairs of speakers.

Using a supplied adaptor, the headphones can be connected directly to the 3.5mm front, rear and centre outputs of a 5.1 sound card. After that, we just had to switch the card into 5.1 surround-sound mode. The resulting impression of 3D surround sound produced a

sense of depth and immersion. A detachable microphone turns them into a gaming headset.

If your sound card, DVD player or games console has coaxial or optical S/PDIF out, you can connect it to the Dolby Digital & Pro Logic Audio Controller that comes with the headphones. The decoder unit even has 5.1 analogue outputs, which can be connected to speakers. We found the Dolby Pro Logic sound highly effective. Effects in our test movies seemed to come from the right directions, although the virtual positioning of sounds right in front of us wasn't quite as convincing as a real set of surround-sound speakers.

This comfortable headset sounds great, and its surround sound makes it perfect for immersive movie and gaming experiences. There are a lot of trailing cables, and its multi-pin connectors are delicate, but it's ideal if you want to avoid disturbing others.

Kat Orphanides



SUMMARY

- ✓ High-quality surround sound
- ✓ Comfortable
- ✗ Expensive; trailing cables

OVER-EAR HEADPHONES Optical/coaxial S/PDIF, 3x 3.5mm 5.1 output, 3.8m cable, 360g
PART CODE TRI-GA600
DETAILS www.trittontechologies.com

HAUPPAUGE XFones

★★★★★

£70 inc VAT

From www.morecomputers.co.uk

Wireless headphones are great for watching movies or playing games. Hauppauge's XFones claim to have the added benefit of 5.1 surround sound. This is achieved through the Dolby Headphone feature of the CyberLink PowerDVD 7 software included. This can create the impression of 5.1 directional sound through any headphones. The surround-sound emulation was convincing, but not as good as a set of 5.1 speakers, particularly at the front and rear of the sound field.

The XFones are easy to use. We just had to plug in the USB dongle and switch on the battery-powered headphones, and they took over as our PC's primary

sound device. Sound quality was good, with a rumbling bass boost that was effective for games and movies.

Despite the price, the XFones don't look expensive and were uncomfortable, as they strained to fit larger heads and slipped off smaller ones. Bass boost and volume controls are on the right side, while the power switch is on the left. The bass-boost button doubles as a pairing button, letting you re-link the headphones to the transmitter if your connection is lost.

The XFones use RF, which produced better quality over distance than similar Bluetooth devices we've tested. The headphones worked well 10m away from our PC. However, they soon cut out when we went around corners or up stairs.

Hauppauge's XFones are fairly expensive, but you're paying for PowerDVD, which normally costs around £25. They sound good and work well, but we were disappointed by their poor fit and cheap feel.

Kat Orphanides



SUMMARY

- ✓ Good sound quality
- ✓ No setup required
- ✗ Poor fit

WIRELESS OVER-EAR HEADPHONES
USB connection, 282g, 117dB sensitivity, frequency response 20-20,000Hz
PART CODE 303
DETAILS www.hauppauge.co.uk

APPLE iPod Nano

★★★★★

£129 inc VAT

From www.apple.com/uk

BEST BUY The latest version of Apple's iPod Nano combines great audio quality with a sharp 2in screen to create an outstanding multimedia player that's small enough to fit in the ticket pocket of a pair of jeans. It lasted over 30 hours in our audio battery test, and over five during video playback. The standard headphones are mediocre, but with our reference set the Nano had clear, rich sound at every setting.



MP3 PLAYER 8GB capacity, supports MP3, Wav, AAC, Protected AAC, Audible, Apple Lossless and AIFF audio, JPEG images, H.264 and MPEG4 video (with limitations), USB Hi-Speed interface PART CODE MB257ZO/A
DETAILS www.apple.com/uk FULL REVIEW Dec 2007

IRHYTHMS A-211

★★★★★

£93 inc VAT

From www.datakits.co.uk

BEST BUY iPod-docking speakers are ideal for enjoying your MP3 collection without having to switch on your PC. However, the compact designs most manufacturers favour aren't ideal for providing good sound quality, and the fee Apple charges for its Made for iPod certification means that most iPod-compatible speakers are poor value compared with standard PC speakers.

IRhythms' A-211 set bucks this trend. The conventional subwoofer-based design provides much deeper bass and louder overall volumes than all-in-one designs, and it produces very high-quality sound, making it well suited for use with iPods and computers.



IPOD DOCK SPEAKERS 2.1 configuration, 133W RMS power, compatible with all docking iPods and first-generation Shuffle, auxiliary line input
PART CODE LN16326 DETAILS www.irhythms.com
FULL REVIEW Oct 2007

PHILIPS SHE2550 Extra Bass

★★★★★

£4 inc VAT

From www.lambda-tek.com/componentshop

BEST BUY Philips' SHE2550 Extra Bass earphones are among the cheapest products we've ever recommended, but this set of earbuds is far superior to the standard earphones that come with most MP3 players. They are comfortable to wear and their open speakers create a full, natural sound that's particularly well suited to rock, pop and dance music. As the name promises, they produce loud, solid bass tones, but this doesn't detract from the clarity and precision of the sound.



EARPHONES 3.5mm stereo jack plug, 1.1m cable, 87g, sensitivity 106dB, frequency response 12-22,000Hz, impedance 16 ohms
PART CODE SHE2550/00 DETAILS www.philips.co.uk
FULL REVIEW Mar 2008